

JOHN HERBERT FOX examined. (No. 10.)

1. *Mr. Beattie.*] What is your position ?—Locomotive Engineer.
2. How many years have you been in the service ?—Just over twenty-seven years.
3. During the Christmas and New Year holidays were you relieving Mr. Jackson at Addington as Locomotive Engineer ?—I was.
4. Were you there when the letter written by Mr. Ronayne was sent down ?—I was away at the time it was received, but I came back a few days afterwards.
5. Was it dealt with in your absence in any way ?—No, it was locked up.
6. You dealt with it on your return ?—Yes.
7. Will you explain what action you took ?—When my attention was called to it, I took it over to the Workshops Manager and read it over to him, and also to three of the principal foremen who were called in. I said it was a very serious charge to make against the workshops, and we should have to go into it fully. I told the Workshops Manager I should write to him asking him for a report, and also for the explanation of the different foremen. I also sent the Manager a copy of the letter. I received reports from the Workshops Manager and his foremen, and replied to Wellington.
8. Will you look at these reports and say if they are true copies of your own report, together with the reports of the Workshops Manager and the various foremen under him ?—If my memory serves me, they are the exact copies of the reports I sent forward. [Copies of reports put in.]
9. As a result of your inquiries, which I presume were made in a searching way, did you find any substantiation of the charges made in that letter ?—Not the slightest.
10. Have you a knowledge of the staff of the other Railway Workshops ?—Yes, I have had charge of most of them from time to time. I am relieving Locomotive Engineer, and in that capacity have to relieve the Locomotive Engineers and also the principal workshops officers.
11. Therefore your experience leads you all over the colony, and into intimate relationship with the various workshops ?—That is so.
12. And you claim, I presume, that you are in a position to judge as between the various workshops ?—Quite so.
13. Will you explain your conscientious opinion as to the discipline and the diligence and work generally at Addington ?—I think it compares most favourably with any other Railway Workshop in the colony, and also with any private shops I have had occasion to visit on departmental business. The quality of the work at Addington compares most favourably with any other I have seen, imported or otherwise.
14. Have you experienced any difficulty in maintaining discipline at Addington or elsewhere ?—No. In none of the workshops have I had any trouble at all.
15. Beyond isolated cases of individual men, have you any reason to suppose that there is systematic loafing in any of the workshops ?—I am quite satisfied it does not exist, as I have said in my reports.
16. The question has been raised as to there being room for improvement in the system of appointing and discharging staff, more particularly the casual staff ?—I think there is room for improvement.
17. What is your idea as to the lines the improvement should take ?—With regard to engagements I think the Workshops Manager ought to be allowed to engage hands and pay them off when they have done with them, selecting the most suitable.
18. That, of course, refers more particularly, I take it, to the casual staff ?—Oh, yes ! I have seen many cases of great delay caused by the present system. Names are sent down, and it has not been possible to find some of the men. An unsuitable man has been started, and after trial had to be paid off. Then there is further delay before other names are received. The list of names you get is taken consecutively. We were instructed to give the man whose name was first on the list the first trial, and we had to wait to hear from him. Very often a delay of weeks occurs. The man might even be out of the colony.
19. You think that in the interests of the shops the Workshops Manager should have power to take on and put off staff ?—I am quite sure.
20. How long is it since you relieved at Hillside ?—Four months ago.
21. What is your opinion as to discipline at Hillside as compared with Addington ?—I do not think it was any better. It is the same in both workshops.
22. Do you consider both workshops are efficient in that respect ?—Yes ; there is no difficulty in maintaining discipline at Hillside or Addington.
23. And each compares with the other ?—I think so.
24. When this letter arrived, and you laid it before your officers, did it cause a considerable amount of vexation ?—They were very much upset that such a charge should be made.
25. And, of course, their reports you sent on in due course ?—Yes, and in those reports they demanded an inquiry to clear them, as they were quite sure the charges were not true.
26. You have been in charge of Auckland as Locomotive Engineer ?—Yes.
27. Will you state your opinion as regards the Newmarket Shops comparatively ?—I do not consider them any better than Addington. The men work about as hard.
28. Are all the workshops working to a similar standard as regards new work ?—They all work to standard drawings.
29. Are they all doing this standard work equally efficiently and equally well ?—Yes.
30. With regard to the plant and appliances at Addington, bearing in mind the class of work they are doing, will you state what you think of the plant and appliances generally ?—I think they are very good. One or two improvements could be made for lifting heavy weights. There should be electric hoists, but for small lifts the pneumatic hoists are suitable.